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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS REFLECTS EPRDF'S
FOCUS ON RECRUITING WOMEN

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Established in 2006, the Ethiopian Women's Parliamentary Caucus comprises one-fifth of the members of Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives (117 of 547 seats), and underscores how the number of women in Ethiopia's Parliament has tripled following the May 2005 national elections. The Caucus receives USAID-funded technical assistance, and seeks to establish linkages with similar caucuses and NGOs in Africa. Of the Caucus's 117 members, all but 9 are affiliated with the ruling Ethiopian Revolutionary People's Democratic Front (EPRDF), reflecting the EPRDF's focus on recruiting women. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Poloff and representatives of donor partners (including Canada, India, Mexico, Norway, Russia, Sweden, UK, and UN agencies) attended a June 11 meeting of the Ethiopian Women's Parliamentary Caucus. Established in September 2006, the caucus aims to increase gender parity; build political and academic capacity of female MPs; increase the participation of women in political activities, leadership, and decision-making; and enhance women's legislative representation. Caucus activities include: capacity-building, national and international networking, information dissemination, research, and media outreach.

WOMEN COMPRISE ONE-FIFTH OF PARLIAMENT

13. (U) According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as of March 31, Ethiopia ranked 45th worldwide in the number of women seated in the lower house of Parliament. Following the May 2005 national elections, the number of women in Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives (Parliament) rose from 7.7 to 21 percent (or from 42 to 117 of 547 seats). The Parliament's Deputy Speaker, Shitaye Minale, is a woman, as is one of the four assistant whips with the rank of state minister: deputy whip for the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Netsanet Afsaw. Women chair two of the Parliament's 13 standing committees, and comprise one-fourth (56 of the 234 members) of the standing committees' members. Out of the five Ethiopian members of the Pan African Parliament, two are women, one of whom serves as chair.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

14. (U) The Caucus has established formal rules and regulations and elected a leadership comprised of five executive members (chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary, and two standing members). Deputy Speaker Shitaye Minale, affiliated with the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and thus the ruling EPRDF, chairs the Caucus; EPRDF whip Netsanet Afsaw serves as deputy chair. The Caucus has four 5-person committees: public and foreign relations, capacity building, fundraising, and audit/control. The Caucus has three categories of membership: Ethiopian women parliamentarians, associate members (who subscribe to and share the

caucus's goals and principles), and honorary members (who have made a substantial contribution to the caucus).

¶5. (U) With USAID funding, U.S.-based NGO Women's Campaign International (WCI) has supported the caucus since January 2006. WCI is providing technical assistance to help the caucus develop a four-year strategic plan; write proposals and develop promotional material; link with other women's caucuses in Africa; develop a directory of women's NGOs and civil society groups in Africa; and provide training. WCI is also organizing study tours for Ethiopian women parliamentarians to learn from the experience of women's caucuses in South Africa and Uganda.

¶6. (U) Of the caucus's four committees, only two are operational: the Fundraising Committee is awaiting feedback from caucus leadership and other committees prior to launching activities, while the Audit/Control Committee is awaiting budget information before it proceeds. According to caucus members, the Public and Foreign Relations Committee has a 4-month plan to develop caucus activities, and seeks to raise public awareness of its activities by disseminating a brochure and coordinating with the media. The Capacity-Building Committee has begun gathering data on lessons learned in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Malawi, but has not yet conducted any in-depth analysis and reporting. It is seeking international support for further training and more informal networking opportunities.

WOMEN'S CAUCUS DOMINATED BY RULING EPRDF

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: The June 11 meeting primarily served as an opportunity for Caucus leaders to introduce the Caucus to donors and avoided any substantive discussion of contentious issues currently

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before Parliament or being debated in the media (e.g., the June 11 conviction of opposition leaders on insurrection charges; Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia; or Parliament's recent passage by majority vote of a new broadcast law, despite an earlier agreement between opposition and ruling EPRDF leaders that it would be subject to inter-party negotiation). The ruling EPRDF coalition dominates the Ethiopia's Women's Parliamentary Caucus. While WCI's proposal for establishing the Caucus had called for an opposition MP to serve as the Caucus's deputy, both the Caucus's chair and deputy chair are affiliated with the EPRDF. Of the 90 women MPs who attended the June 11 Caucus meeting, only 3 were members of the opposition. According to WCI, of the 117 women parliamentarians, only 9 are not members of the ruling EPRDF. Senior EPRDF officials frequently criticize opposition parties for failing to focus as aggressively on women as the EPRDF does. END COMMENT.